

## ACCIDENT/INCIDENT INVESTIGATIONS

HQ Office of Safety and Health  
Peter Robertson

### ***Timely Incident Investigations are critical to an effective Injury and Illness Prevention Program.***

**A**n incident is not only a “hit” resulting in an injury or loss, but also a near miss or other unusual occurrence that warrants the need for prompt incident investigation.

Usually an incident is defined as “an unplanned event resulting in an unwanted and negative impact to the organization.” Typically, this involves an injury and may include damage or other types of loss to property (this includes office-related incidents too).

**First- and second-line supervisors** must, **and are required to**, initiate incident investigations as soon as they become aware of an event. The quicker the facts are recorded, the more accurate the report will be. A great deal can change at a scene immediately after an incident. Moved or added equipment/vehicles, changes in signage, traffic and weather conditions, etc. can distort the facts. Trying to document the facts hours or days after an event is usually a difficult task. Valuable information is lost. As time goes by, speculation and conjecture frequently cloud the memories of witnesses.

Timely and accurate documentation of incident information is the best method of investigation.

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## Ticklish Tactics to Create a Funnier You

Planet Mirth  
Polly Schack

*Polly is an ex-Caltrans employee, but remains friends with the Office of Safety and Health. I hope you enjoy her tips on how to cope with the stresses of everyday life using humor as a tool.*

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1. Begin your day with some “humor aerobics.”
2. Watch kids--get ideas.
3. Laugh at yourself-- what’s different about you (gray hair, bald, pimple on your nose, etc.)
4. Do things differently – change your routine.
5. Pay attention; humor is everywhere--Greeting cards, bumper stickers...
6. Share yourself; it’s not the joke that’s funny, it’s you!

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# SAFER DAYS & HEALTHIER WAYS

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## The Four Stages of Safety Awareness

HQ Office of Safety and Health

*This article was first released in the April 1992 Safety Line. It is still valid information today.*

If you've ever worked adjacent to moving highway traffic, as many Caltrans employees do, you quickly realize that it is not the safest place to be. Unfortunately, many employees who work near moving traffic on a day-to-day basis become complacent and no longer perceive it as a hazard.

This article will attempt to illustrate how indifference to a hazard, perpetrated by familiarization evolves through an explanation of the human learning/awareness process. What this means is employees no longer think it's dangerous because they are used to it. If you're not totally confused at this point, please read on!

As stated in the title of this article, there are four stages of awareness that occur in humans. Briefly, the four stages are as follows:

### First Stage: Unconscious Incompetence

This stage occurs when you are brand new at a job and "don't know what you need to know". You are not aware of the hazards and wouldn't know them if you saw them. This illustrates why new employee safety orientation is so important.

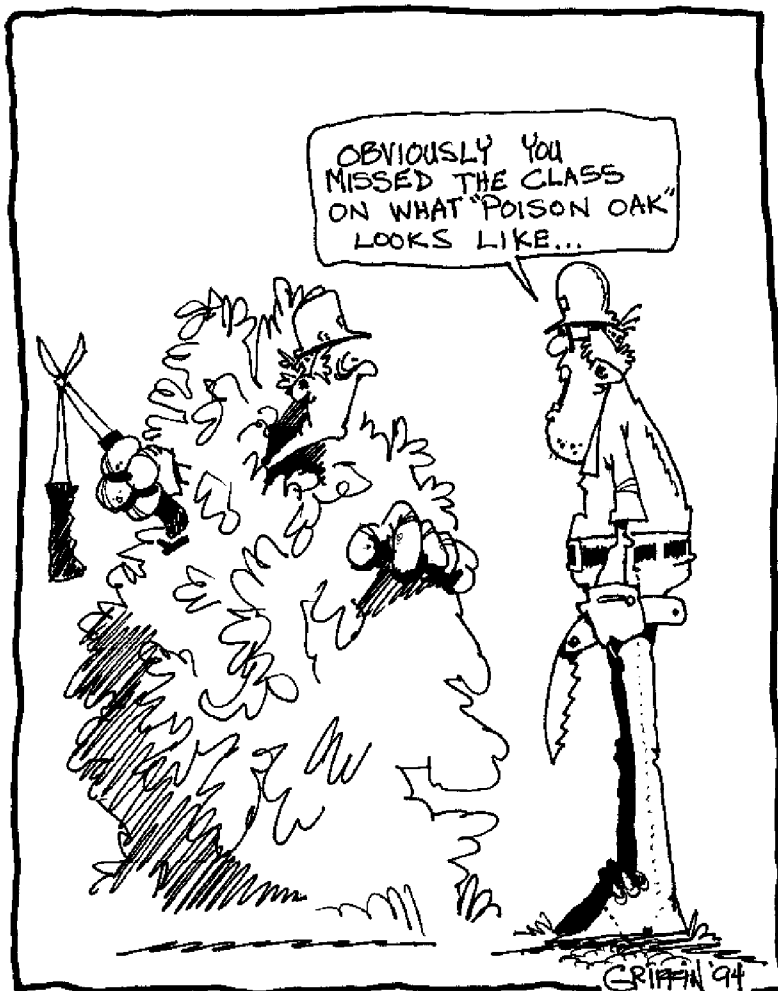
### Second Stage: Conscious Incompetence

At this stage, an individual "knows that I don't know what I need to know". In other words, the employee is aware that there are dangers associated with the work, but still does not know how to correctly deal with them.

### Third Stage: Conscious Competence

At this point, you are aware of what you need to know and do, but you have to consciously think about the task. This is the ideal level for safety, especially when working around construction activities, moving equipment, and highway traffic. Training, both in the classroom and hands-on, coupled with on the job experiences brings an individual to the stage of conscious competence.

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## A FUNNIER YOU

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7. When you're in a tight spot, use "verbal aikido".
8. Read the funnies? Cut out what tickles you; post it on the fridge.
9. Spend time with the chronologically gifted people in your life.
10. Take a funny picture of yourself with a friend--tack it up; send it to 'em.
11. Take your own personal survey of something "strange" that will make others laugh.
12. Remember you can always "Do over"
13. Look for humor "happenings" everywhere (elevators, airports, etc.) Share them.
14. Study your favorite comedians.
15. Relax physically and you'll relax mentally.
16. Make a list of things that "bug" you--creatively dispense with the list.
17. Take time to be playful--people don't expect it.
18. When you face difficulties, always think: "How could this be worse?"
19. Practice, Practice, Practice --Humor skills improve with use!!!

And I have one more...

**SMILE**

.....

The latest revision to the Safety Manual, Number M00-01, has been distributed recently to Managers and Supervisors. Take time to insert the updates so the most current resource material will be there when you need it, in your Caltrans Safety Manual.

The Maintenance Program has recently revised their CODE OF SAFE OPERATING PRACTICES. It can be accessed on the intranet at:  
<http://onramp.dot.ca.gov/hq/maint/omee/cosp.pdf>

## Safety Awareness

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### Fourth Stage: Unconscious Competence

At this stage, an individual knows (is familiar with) the work so well that he/she doesn't have to think about what they're doing. An example would be the average driver. He or she really doesn't think about what they're doing while operating a car; they accelerate, shift gears, brake and signal automatically. It is this tendency to "get used to" things that is so dangerous while working around heavy equipment and near moving traffic. The "beep-beep-beep" of backing alarms gets tuned out, cars whizzing by at 60 + miles per hour become non-existent, and hazards that a new worker would definitely be aware of become all too commonplace.

One of the indicators that a worker is at the fourth stage is the tendency to disregard "near-miss" incidents. This does not mean that a person is careless or inattentive; it simply indicates an over-familiarity with the situation. What a fourth level (conditioned) worker would perceive as an everyday occurrence, others would probably consider a "near-miss".

If you are at the "fourth stage" and work around construction equipment or moving traffic, make an effort to maintain a "third stage" awareness while working in hazardous locations; your life or the life of a co-worker may depend on it. If you are involved in a "near-miss" incident, take the time to thoroughly investigate why it happened. An analysis of the situation may allow for changes in procedures that will make your workplace safer.

If you would like more information on "near misses" or the four stages of learning/awareness, please contact the Headquarters Safety Office.

# SAFER DAYS & HEALTHIER WAYS

## INVESTIGATIONS

*continued from page 1*

Don't rely on another's report to replace your own investigation.

You are looking for facts to analyze, with an eye to avoiding this type of incident in the future. Your agenda is solely to provide a safer workplace for the betterment of the department. **WE** are the Department!

**Here are a few tips** to get your investigation off to a quick start, after any injured persons have been attended to:

1. **Ask for assistance, NOW.** Call the Headquarters or District Safety Office and ask for assistance. They have specialized training in incident investigation.
2. **Photograph** the site from many points using the North, East, South, West of scene orientations. Include items such as signage, equipment, other vehicles or structures that might have influenced the situation. Be sure to capture a broad representation of the entire area surrounding the scene.
3. **Witnesses** Let them know who you are, give them your business card. Gather basic witness information such as names, addresses, home and work phone numbers. Ask them to give you a statement. Make arrangements to call them later in the day. They may remember something else, and it gives you both a chance to review earlier statements.

**Tip:** *Use a separate sheet of paper to document each witnesses' statement. This eliminates confusion later when you are trying to read your notes.*

4. **Measurements and sketches** are extremely valuable for follow up analysis. Carefully measure and sketch the scene. Quite often others who are not familiar with the area will be reviewing this information.
5. **Timely, Clear, and Concise Information** is the key to a good investigation. Facts, not conjecture and hearsay will improve our Injury and Illness Prevention Program.
6. **SAFETY MANUAL** Chapter 4 is a good place to review incident investigation techniques. You can also call your Headquarters or District Safety Office to discuss setting up an investigative process before you need it.

*There are two kinds of men who never amount to much: those who cannot do what they are told and those who can do nothing else.*

*---Cyrus H. Curtis*

## AN INJURY FREE WORKPLACE

***It's everyone's responsibility...  
and it's the right thing to do!***

### DID YOU KNOW?

*Over 75% of the motor vehicle accidents Caltrans employees had between 1990 and 1999 occurred when the weather was clear and the roads were dry.  
Are we letting our guard down?*

**SAFER DAYS**

**& HEALTHIER WAYS**



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